

# ALL ABOUT XTRO!

by Stephen Jones

**I**t was an unusually bright & warm Spring morning when I forced my way thru the rush-hour crowds in London to visit the location filming of a new science fiction/horror thriller entitled XTRO (short for Extra Terrestrial, not to be confused with Steven Spielberg's box office success E.T., which stands for the same thing).



The woman's screams are abruptly silenced by the terrifying appendage of the alien.

The producer of XTRO, Mark Forstater, showed me around and explained what XTRO is all about:

## horror from space

*Abducted by an alien civilization 3 years earlier, a man returns to Earth horribly changed. The monstrous humanoid alien he has become attacks a number of people before transforming itself into the missing person, Sam Ellis. Sam returns home to his wife, Rachel—who is understandably shocked to see him after 3 years—and begins to act strangely, taking an excessive interest in their 8-year-old son. Contaminated by contact with his prodigal father, a bond is irreversibly established when the boy is imbued with the power of spontaneous creation: his fertile imagination brings his toys to life—with deadly results. With the aid of her lover, Rachel battles against her alienated family, finally losing them during a spectacular & unearthly climax in a dark wood. Broken, Rachel returns to her apartment, only to discover that the nightmare has not yet ended...*

Forstater was quick to point out that XTRO is not an exploitation genre piece like INSEMINOID, with which it shares some superficial plot similarities.

XTRO marks the feature debut of 32-year-old Harry Bromley Davenport. In 1974, on the advice of a mutual friend, Forstater saw Davenport's short horror film, WHISPERS OF FEAR, and liked it very much. Davenport, who has an interest in the horror genre, had an idea for a film titled THE HORRIFIC MOVIE HOUSE MASSACRE. Forstater attempted to secure financial backing for the movie, and it was announced several times, but the project ultimately collapsed. Then Davenport and well-known anthologist & author Michel Parry came to Forstater with the idea for XTRO.

## ready...set...go

On the set, I watched Davenport shoot 3 or 4 setups quickly & efficiently. These involved a sequence in which a toy tank comes murderously to life and pursues Rachel's lover around the apartment. The enclosed rooms proved to be a problem for the lighting cameraman (most film sets break apart to allow for lights) and at times it was difficult to control external noise when sound was being recorded.

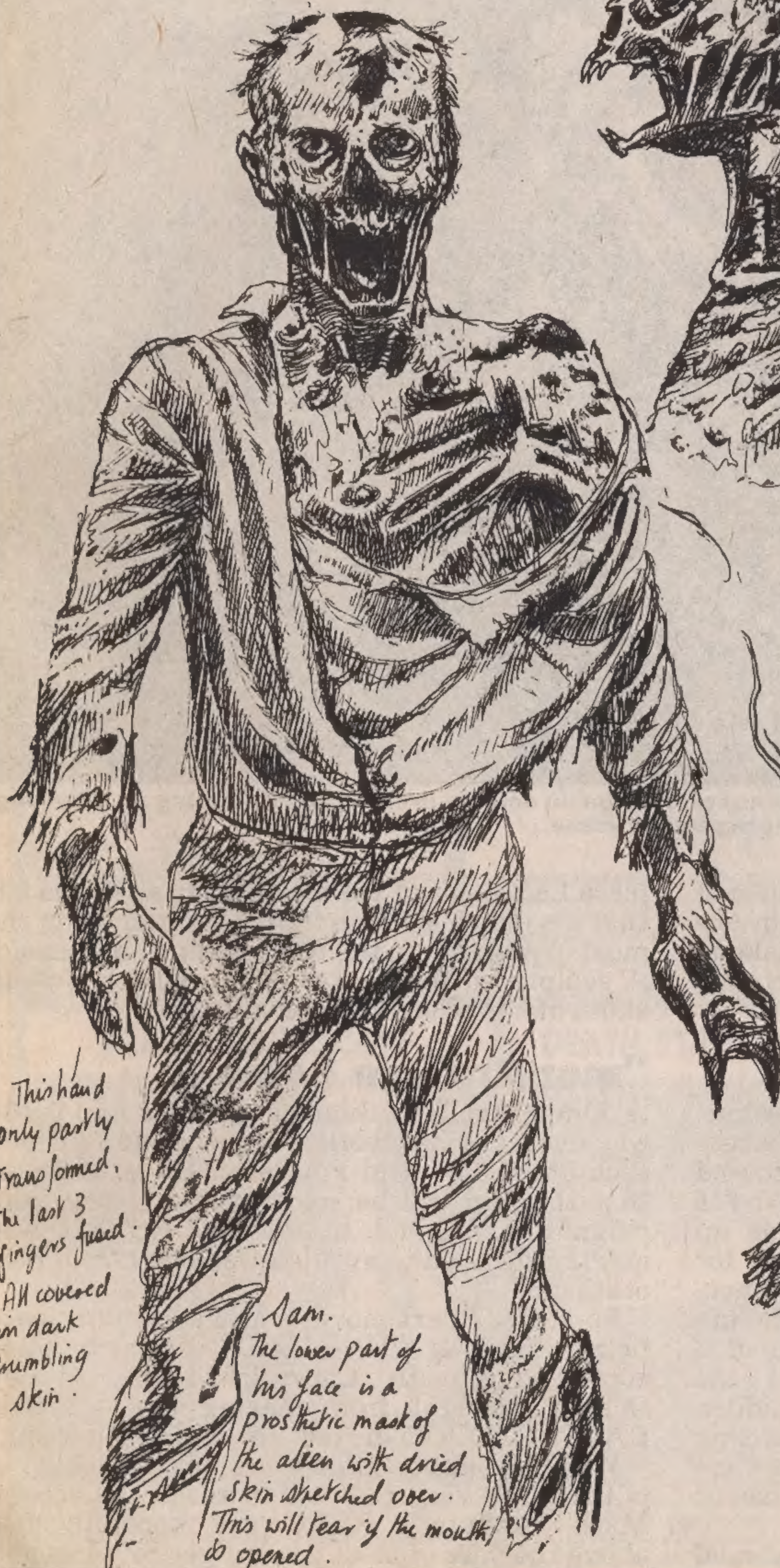
The talented special effects team of Tom Harris & Francis Coates have both had wide television experience. With science fiction & horror subjects leading the state of the art in this area, it's not surprising that even a low-budget film such as XTRO is filled with effects sequences. Forstater explained that the movie will contain "at least 3 or 4 major 'buzz' sequences" which would excite & awe an audience, and he had only praise for the team handling these often difficult scenes. Almost 40% of the effects work was



Scene 167 P.91. Effect 139.

Side view of Sam's head with detail of how the prosthetic appliques might be placed.

Inflatable panel.



Alien Hand: a rigid 'glove'.



This hand only partly transformed, the last 3 fingers fused. All covered in dark crumbling skin.

Sam.  
The lower part of his face is a prosthetic mask of the alien with dried skin sketched over. This will tear if the mouth is opened.

Tony. Less advanced. The scalp of the alien form has appeared, and Tony's skin is dry wrinkled & mummy like.. His chest & stomach are built up.

Preproduction sketches from XTRO show how the actor's head (upper right) fits inside the mask. Marginal notes indicate that "lower part of the alien face is a prosthetic mask" which will tear if the mouth is opened.





Once a Man, now a Monster. Inset, fitting a false stomach on an actress preparatory to filming an alien egg impregnation scene.

completed during live-action filming because of the budget restrictions. This ranged from the radio-controlled toys to special Latex makeup effects & difficult multi-image opticals attempted directly inside the camera.

## **bzzzzz**

XTRO also offers 2 alien monster designs, which resemble H.R. Giger's full-grown creature in ALIEN. Davenport & Forstater discussed these designs with artist Chris Hobbs, who is the film's visual consultant. Hobbs came up with a number of effective ideas—not only for just the aliens but also for Forstater's aforementioned "buzz" sequences: these include the impregnation of alien eggs under the skin of a young au pair, the decomposition of the creatures' human bodies revealing the hidden alien forms within and, perhaps most startling of all, *a woman giving birth to a fully-grown man!* Hobbs' pre-production artwork has a strong EC Comics quality.

A dancer named Tick from the controversial group "Shock" was ensconced inside the one-

piece Latex suit of the major alien, as it was felt that his dance & mime training would bring the most expression to the black-skinned humanoid. A sculptured model was also used for closeup shots of the alien's head & shoulders.

## **"monstro" go home**

"One of the best things about this film is the way everyone has worked together and pushed each other on," said Forstater. He is adamant that the film will be sold with "a classy campaign" (the original title of MONSTRO was quickly changed to avoid any shock horror connotations).

Forstater's next movie is also a horror/science fiction subject: CONTAGIOUS, which he is coproducing with Chrysalis Films. Harley Cokliss, straight from making the futuristic BATTLETRUCK in New Zealand, is directing.

With his support of new talent & his belief in putting the very best up there on the screen, Mark Forstater's XTRO will hopefully rise above the mire of most low budget SF films and be well-worth waiting for.

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